THE CASE FOR ALEATORY JOURNALISM

Subtitle: Piercing the PR Shield with Controlled Chaos

PART I: THE ESSAY

The Death of the Interview

We are witnessing the slow, comfortable death of the candid interview.

In the contemporary media landscape, the conversation between journalist and subject has devolved into rehearsed theatre. The subject, often media-trained to within an inch of their life, arrives armed with a mental binder of "Key Messages." The journalist, pressed for time and resources, arrives with a linear list of questions that follow a predictable, logical path: *What inspired this? How was the process? What is next?*

The result is a stalemate. The journalist asks a standard question; the subject retrieves a pre-fabricated answer. We ask about the "inspiration" for a novel, and the author recites the anecdote they have already told on three podcasts and a morning show. Nothing is revealed. No truth is uncovered. We are trading scripts, not ideas.

The fatal flaw of standard journalism is its linearity. Logic is predictable. If a subject can see where a line of questioning is going, they can prepare their defenses. They can steer the car because the road is straight. To get off the road, we must change the vehicle.

The PR Shield

I call this defensive posture the "PR Shield." It is the polished, impenetrable surface that deflects genuine inquiry. It is not necessarily malicious; it is a survival mechanism in a world of "gotcha" journalism and viral out-of-context clips. But it kills the story. It prevents the "deep dive" from ever reaching the bottom.

To pierce this shield, we cannot simply push harder. Force begets resistance. Instead, we must change the physics of the conversation. We must introduce an element that neither the journalist nor the subject can control.

We must introduce *Chaos*.

The Theory of Aleatory Intervention

Aleatory comes from the Latin *alea*, referring to a game of dice. In art, it refers to work created by chance. In journalism, it is the practice of using a randomized semantic system—specifically the Tarot—to disrupt the linear flow of an interview.

This is not divination. We are not predicting the future. We are using the cards as a **Randomized Semantic Generator**.

When I place a Tarot card on the table, it acts as a "Third Party" in the conversation. It is an impartial disruptor. If I ask a CEO about their leadership style, they give me a spin. But if I pull the *Five of Cups*—an image of grief, loss, and spilled wine—and ask them to reconcile their career with that image, the cognitive load shifts.

The Mechanism: Associative Thinking

The mechanism at work is *associative thinking*. When faced with a random image, the brain must scramble to find a connection. It forces the subject to go "off-script." They cannot recite a talking point because they have no talking point for the *Five of Cups*.

They must look at the image, look inside themselves, and build a bridge between the two. In that moment of construction, the PR Shield drops. The subject stops performing and starts thinking. They reveal their anxieties, their subconscious drivers, and their lateral connections.

The Result

The resulting story is not what the journalist wanted to hear, nor what the subject wanted to say. It is something truer than both. By surrendering control to the cards, we gain access to the raw material of the human experience. We move from the "What" and the "When" to the messy, complicated "Why."

Aleatory Journalism is not about magic; it is about breaking the script to find the story that was hiding in the margins.

PART II: THE EVIDENCE

*The following transcripts demonstrate the Aleatory System in action across three distinct "Seasons" (World, Devil, Moon). Note how the **Anchor Card** sets the thematic stage, the **Wild Card** disrupts the flow, and the **Guest Card** builds community.*

CASE STUDY 1: Lara (Anatomical Pathology Technologist)

Context: "World Month" | **Deck:** *Christina Ricci Cat Full of Spiders*

FINBARRE: The first card is **The World**. It represents something that is long-awaited that's been achieved.^1

LARA: It actually took me 10 years before I managed to get a job in the mortuary from when I first started actively looking when I was 19. That is quite a common theme with people who work in this industry; it is so, so hard to break into. So just the fact that that's the card of the month is very, very apt for my job, really. [1]

FINBARRE: Card Two: **The Devil**. Often the devil card represents bondage, temptation, shadow aspects of the self. As your work brings you face to face with suffering, loss and despair, how do you confront those darker aspects? [2222]

LARA: It’s such a good question... I don’t see the people that are in our care as “bodies,” quote unquote. They are people to me. And I just sort of figure that I’m meeting these people at this point in their life. This is who they are. Also, I find it quite funny that as an ex-Catholic, the card that I pulled was the devil. [3333]

FINBARRE: Card Three: **The Upside Down Ace of Wands** (Selected by Helen Nesburg). A temporary creative void! Have you ever watched a TV series or film that’s tried to capture what a mortuary does and completely missed the point? [4444]

LARA: I find it very, very, very difficult to actually watch media like that... Silent Witness is not great... The idea of pathologists working in their own clothes, not wearing scrubs... They’re the star of the show... It’s not actually that exciting at all. [5555555555555555]

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift to the next guest?

LARA: The Ten of Cups (Dix de Coupe). [6]

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^1 **The World:** *The Anchor Card aligns perfectly here with the concept of a "long journey." Lara reveals the 10-year struggle to enter her field, immediately grounding the "woo" of the Tarot in the hard reality of professional persistence.*

^2 **The Devil:** *The "Wild Card" here acts as a provoker. Instead of rejecting the darkness of the card, Lara reframes it. She uses the prompt to discuss her compartmentalization strategy: viewing the deceased not as "bodies" but as "patients," a distinction that protects her from the "shadow aspects" the card implies.*

CASE STUDY 2: Leigh Alexander (Narrative Designer)

Context: "Devil Season" | **Deck:** *Phantom Wise Tarot*

FINBARRE: Your first card is **The Devil**. What powerful desires or fixations have shaped your creative path? [7777]

LEIGH: I work as a video game developer... Tarot and narrative design are practically the same thing. We are sort of taking these relatively infinite components that can be assembled into infinite variety of chains of meaning... Whenever I see the devil... it asks me to think about where I’m giving my power away. And my work is about empowerment in a storytelling context. [8888]

FINBARRE: Card Two (Wild): **The Four of Wands**. Usually a card of stability, community and getting to enjoy your accomplishments. [9]

LEIGH: Oh my God, what a terrible question. I take no pride in myself. I do not celebrate myself. I prefer to dissociate when I get tired... Maybe I’m having like a kind of Four of Wands issue right now. [10101010]

FINBARRE: Card Three (Guest): **The Star** (Selected by Laura Binnie). What hope or guiding light do you carry into the future? [11111111]

LEIGH: I think maybe storytelling is one of the only tools that we still have left that the machine can't take away from us to do magic for ourselves... [12]

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift?

LEIGH: The King of Cups (Father of Cups). [13]

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^3 **The Devil (Anchor):** *Leigh Alexander offers a meta-commentary here, explicitly linking Tarot to her own profession (Narrative Design). She reclaims the Devil card not as "sin" but as a question of "Agency"—a core mechanic in game design.*

^4 **The Four of Wands:** *This is the Aleatory Shift in action. A "positive" card (Celebration) elicits a negative/vulnerable response ("I take no pride in myself"). A standard interviewer asking "How do you celebrate success?" would likely get a standard answer. The visual of the card forced a confrontation with her inability to celebrate.*

CASE STUDY 3: Scarlet Vikki (Performer)

Context: "Devil Season" | **Deck:** *The Wild Unknown*

FINBARRE: The Anchor: **The Devil**. It's also a card of temptation and desire. Is performing in front of people addictive? [14141414]

VIKKI: With Miss Scarlet, where I'm taking my clothes off... I have a full room in front of me watching me strip... And there is that element of saying to your crowd "Desire me, look at me." And at the same time, I have words written on me that will make the audience really uncomfortable... that is also really addictive. [15151515]

FINBARRE: Card Two (Wild): **Strength**. A lion with a flower in its mouth. How do you balance physical exertion with emotional resilience? [16161616]

VIKKI: I call it "queen energy"... It's about having strength in holding back. Really value keeping my dignity even if people are trying to provoke me to lose it. [17]

FINBARRE: Card Three (Guest): **The Father (King) of Cups** (Selected by Leigh Alexander). [18]

VIKKI: Compassion costs nothing... To me, a good performer is the person who stands up and puts their act together and presents themselves from the heart... It's not a competition. [191919191919191919]

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift?

VIKKI: Princess of Wands! [20]

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^5 **The Devil:** *Scarlet Vikki leans into the archetype. She uses the "Devil" prompt to deconstruct the voyeuristic nature of her burlesque work, framing the "addiction" not as vanity, but as the power to control the audience's gaze.*

^6 **The King of Cups (Guest):** *Note the chain reaction. Leigh Alexander (Game Designer) passed a card of emotional control. Scarlet Vikki (Performer) interprets this as "Compassion" within the competitive world of circus arts, proving the system allows for cross-industry dialogue.*

CASE STUDY 4: Sacha Coward (Queer Historian)

Context: "Devil Season" | **Deck:** *Ink Witch Tarot*

FINBARRE: The Anchor: **The Devil**. Which folkloric monster feels unfairly demonized? 21212121

SACHA: The Minotaur. It is a child... It was born and it has a sister and a mother and a father... And so it may be this monstrous being, but it has this familial connection that is kind of tragic. 222222222222222222

FINBARRE: Card Two (Wild): **The Tower**. One of the most strikingly disruptive cards... Has anyone ever proven you wrong about what you thought you knew about queerness in history? 23232323

SACHA: I think one of the big understandings is that queer people are just like any kind of person. We have our baddies... We're no worse than other people, but we're also no better. So that's been like a big sense of transformation. 24

FINBARRE: Card Three (Guest): **The Ten of Swords** (Selected by Laura Anthony Siragher). Which crisis or calamity in your career path was most transformative? 25252525

SACHA: My previous publisher... went bust... It really, really sucked because you have this book that's doing really well... But it's weirdly resulted in me being with actually a better publisher... So I guess that's the positivity I see there. 262626262626262626

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift?

SACHA: The Magician (From the aesthetics of it all). 27

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^7 **The Tower:** *The "Wild Card" delivered a precise metaphorical hit. The Tower (Sudden Collapse) perfectly mirrored Sacha's experience with his publisher going bust. The card allowed him to externalize the trauma of that event and discuss it structurally rather than just emotionally.*

CASE STUDY 5: Treasa McCabe (Game Designer)

Context: "Moon Month" | **Deck:** *Standard/Various*

FINBARRE: The Anchor: **The Moon**. Working with supernatural themes, how do you navigate the unconscious and the weird in game design? [28282828]

TREASA: When we were growing up... People still don't walk in fairy rings. We still avoid cutting down fairy trees... It's kind of drawing from those stories and fears and beliefs of your childhood... What it is to be Irish while sitting in the darkness. [29292929]

FINBARRE: Card Two (Wild): **Four of Swords**. A card of rest, recovery... What does rest look like to you? [30303030]

TREASA: It looks like not having to make decisions... It's hanging out with my friends. It's playing music. I'm in a middle-aged girl band... Just in that flow state. [313131313131313131]

FINBARRE: Card Three (Guest): **Judgment** (Selected by Frank Duffy). [32]

TREASA: It's a point where... we have to kind of make those decisions about what's next... You look back and you have to have a bit of a retrospective with yourself on whether that's something you want to do again. [33]

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift?

TREASA: The Eight of Wands (Reversed). [34]

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^8 **The Moon:** *The Anchor Card forces a cultural connection. Treasa McCabe connects the card's "illusion" aspect to Irish folklore, grounding her game design philosophy in her heritage rather than just technical mechanics.*

CASE STUDY 6: C.B. Lee (Author)

Context: "Moon Month" | **Deck:** *Hexen 5.0*

FINBARRE: The Anchor: **The Moon**. A time of dreams and distortion. [35]

C.B. LEE: I'm currently working on another book... It's really fun being in this space where I'm still dreaming up the story and it can kind of go any which way at this point. [36]

FINBARRE: Card Two (Wild): **Two of Cups**. Mutual attraction... What do you think is essential when representing queer connections on a page? [37373737]

C.B. LEE: I would love to see more characters get to be messy or evil or vindictive... It felt like... if you created someone... that wasn't quite perfect, it was a blow to the queer community... I want to see them have the range of emotions... [383838383838383838]

FINBARRE: Card Three (Guest): **Page of Cups** (Selected by Cay Macres). [39]

C.B. LEE: I think it's about joy... I really do want people to see and read my work and feel like they are being comforted or held or like that they're safe here in this story. [40]

FINBARRE: Which card do you gift?

C.B. LEE: **The Magician**. [41]

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^9 **The Two of Cups:** *A profound "Aleatory Shift." C.B. Lee uses the card of "perfect love" to discuss the pressure of writing "perfect" queer characters. The card acts as a foil, allowing the author to critique the very thing the card represents.*

PART III: THE SYSTEM

Glossary of Terms

- **The Operator:** The Journalist/Interviewer.
- **The Querent:** The Interviewee.
- **The Season:** A thematic period (e.g., "Devil Season," "Moon Month") where every guest receives the same **Anchor Card**.
- **The Chain:** The link established between guests via the **Guest Card**.
- **Aleatory Shift:** The moment the subject abandons talking points to address the card's visual metaphor.

The Tri-Card Spread

Slot 1: THE ANCHOR CARD (The Control)

- **Source:** Pre-selected by the Operator for the month/issue.
- **Function:** The "Control Group." By asking every guest the same question based on one card (e.g., *The Devil* during "Devil Season"), you create a comparative dataset.
- **Example:** *The Devil* $\rightarrow$ Sacha Coward discusses the Minotaur; Scarlet Vikki discusses the addiction of performance.

Slot 2: THE WILD CARD (The Chaos)

- **Source:** Pulled randomly during the interview. The subject says "Stop."
- **Function:** The "Variable." This forces immediate improvisation.
- **Example:** *The Tower* $\rightarrow$ Sacha Coward reveals the collapse of his publisher. *The Two of Cups* $\rightarrow$ C.B. Lee discusses the pressure of "perfect" queer representation.

Slot 3: THE GUEST CARD (The Community)

- **Source:** Selected by the *previous* interviewee.
- **Function:** The "Chain." This turns solitary interviews into a conversation.
- **Example:** Leigh Alexander gifts *The King of Cups* $\rightarrow$ Scarlet Vikki must answer a question based on Leigh's choice.

Best Practices

1. Respect the Chain.

The Guest Card is the most powerful tool for building community. It forces the current subject to engage with the energy of the previous subject, creating a "meta-narrative" across your publication.

2. Visuals Matter.

Always describe the card vividly (e.g., "A goat with flaming hooves" or "A lion with a flower in its mouth"). The visual anchors the answer.

A Final Note

The deck does not matter. The belief in magic does not matter. What matters is the **Pattern**. As humans, we are pattern-seeking machines. We cannot help but find meaning in chaos.

Aleatory Journalism simply provides the chaos, so the subject can find the meaning.

Shuffle the deck. Cut the cards. Ask the question.